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Leadership as an Effective Tool in Management Activities

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ABSTRACT

the paper examines the issues of effective leadership in different organizations. The authors describe and analyze elements of situational leadership and consider the relationship between personal characteristics of a person and his/her leadership abilities. The authors give illustrative examples of leadership qualities in different historical persons.

KEYWORDS: leadership, effective leadership, situational leadership, management, manager.

What makes a person an effective leader? This question has long been of interest to scientists. One of the best known and simplest answers is provided by the theory of great men. Its supporters can be found among historians, political scientists, psychologists and sociologists. The great person theory argues that a person who possesses a certain set of personality traits will be a good leader regardless of the nature of the situation in which he or she finds himself or herself. The absolute embodiment of great person theory is the concept of a charismatic leader, who is worshipped by others (from the Greek *charizma* - gift, grace of God, mercy of the gods).

If this theory is true, then there must be some key personality traits that make a person a great leader and an outstanding leader [3]. What are they: high intelligence, charisma (charm), sociability, courage? Or a combination of both? Which is better: to be an extrovert or an introvert? Should a ruler be utterly ruthless, as suggested in 1513 by Niccolò Machiavelli in his famous treatise *The Sovereign*? Or are the best leaders the most moral people? Or perhaps the great Lao Tzu, who wrote two thousand years ago: "A nation is ruled by justice, a war is waged by stealth", was the right answer. Or it is not the personality of the leader that matters, but the social characteristics of the environment in which it was formed: family composition, education, previous occupations?

Psychologists, concerned about this issue, have conducted many special studies. They now number in the hundreds. And what is it? Almost nothing! Some rather weak correlations can indeed be found. But in general it can be said that there are no strong correlations. Surprisingly it turns out that very few personality traits are directly related to leadership performance and the correlations found tend to be rather weak.

Here are some correlations found between individual personality traits and leadership performance.

1. leaders usually have a slightly higher intelligence than their "flock". But not by much. The aspirant to leadership should never be disconnected from the average intellectual level of his followers. The "over-intelligent" are inevitably rejected by the crowd. They are terribly distant from the people.... A highbrow intellectual may occupy the position of the chief's closest aide, a wise man, a secret advisor or, in the best case, a grey cardinal. But "the way to the throne" is often closed to him. Alas.

2. Motivation for power. Many leaders are driven by a strong desire for power. They have a strong focus on their own persona, concern for prestige, ambition, and an excess of energy. Such leaders tend to be better socially prepared, more flexible and adaptable. Their ambition and capacity for intrigue helps them to stay "afloat" for long periods of time. But for them there is a problem of effectiveness. For example, Boris Yeltsin is usually seen as a leader with an extremely strong desire for power. He managed to rule Russia for almost 10 years. However, the question of whether he was an effective leader for the country remains open [2].

3. A study of historical records showed that among the 600 famous monarchs, the most famous ones were either very moral or extremely immoral. Hence we can assume that there are two paths to celebrity: one must either be a model of morality and virtue or have Machiavelli's unscrupulousness[6].

4. Simonton, an American psychologist, collected information on 100 personality traits of all US presidents. This included the characteristics of the families they grew up in, their education, their past occupations and their personality traits themselves. Only three of these variables - height, family size and the number of books published by the president before he took office - correlated with the president's performance in office (as measured by historians' estimates). Simonton found that US presidents who grew up in small families were more likely to remain in history as great political figures. Franklin Roosevelt, for example, who is considered one of the most prominent American presidents, was an only child. The remaining 97 characteristics, including personality traits, according to this study, have nothing to do with a person's effectiveness as a leader at all.

5. There is a small positive correlation between a person's height and the likelihood that he or she will become the leader of the group. Thus, almost all elections in the United States have been won by a taller candidate, with only two exceptions: Richard Nixon's victory over George McGovern in 1972 and Jimmy Carter's victory over Gerald Ford in 1976. In 1992, Bill Clinton was four inches (10 cm) taller than George W. Bush. In 1996, he was only half an inch (about 1.5 cm) taller than Robert Dole. Once in the White House, tall presidents are more likely to become notable historical figures[3]. It could be argued that a tall person is slightly more likely to become a leader. However, it should not be forgotten that the greatest leaders were Napoleon, Hitler, Lenin, Stalin and many others who could not boast of being tall.

6. Ironically, there is very little evidence that traits such as charisma (charm), courage, dominance or self-confidence are indicators of a person's effectiveness as a leader.

So, some modest correlation between personality traits and leadership ability can be found. But in general it is very difficult to predict how good a leader will be based on personality traits alone. Therefore, over time, researchers have tended to believe that it is not enough to look at personality traits alone. One should also consider the situation in which these traits manifest themselves. This does not mean that personality traits do not affect the chances of becoming a leader at all. It is just that one should consider both the personality of the person and the nature of the situation in which he or she has to play a leadership role. According to this view,

one does not need to be a "great person" to be an effective leader. Rather, one has to be the right person in the right place at the right time [4].

A leader cannot be a leader always and everywhere. He or she can only show his or her leadership qualities in the right situation. For example, a business leader may be very successful in some situations and fail in others. Consider the example of Steve Jobs, who, at the age of 21, co-founded the legendary Apple Computers with Stephen Wozniak. The eccentric Jobs was the least like a traditional corporate executive. He had been brought up in the counterculture of the 1960s, and turned to computers with a history of LSD use, a trip to India and life in a commune. In those days, when there were still no personal computers, Jobs' unusual style was just what was needed to create a new industry. Within five years, he had become the leader of a multibillion-dollar corporation. It turned out, however, that Jobs' unorthodox manner was ill-suited to the delicate and complex business of running a large corporation in a competitive marketplace. Apple began to suffer losses, losing out in competition with its competitors. In 1985 Jobs was forced out of the business under pressure from John Scully, a man Jobs himself had once invited to run his firm. Interestingly, a few years later, Apple was again taken over by Steve Jobs[8]. This happened when the company was faced with the need to make a technological leap: to improve the operating system of its Macintosh, to regain the trust of its customers and its former position on the market.

You have probably realised by now that a corporate leader who wants to remain effective over the long term must be able to adapt quickly to changing circumstances and vary his or her behaviour flexibly. Not everyone can do that. Very few do. More often than not, managers become fixated on one style of behaviour which, for example, proved effective during the company's formative years, but is totally unsuited to a period of intense growth and retention. The result is that over time the firm loses the ability to compete on the market. Another telling example is the sad fate of the legendary John Ackers, the CEO of IBM, who was infamously sacked in 1993 after a distinguished and successful career. Having made IBM the flagship of the computer industry in the 1980s, Ackers found himself unable to cope with the rapid technological change that had gripped the computer industry since the early 1990s. It is no coincidence that in today's Western HighTech business it is rare for top management to rest safely in their chairs for more than five years. Periodic "changing of the guard" allows corporations to remain dynamic and adequately navigate the rapidly changing world.

There are several leadership theories that focus on both the personal characteristics of the leader and the situation in which he or she acts. The best known is the contingency theory of leadership by Fred Fiedler. The situational theory of leadership states that the effectiveness of a leader depends both on how task- or relationship-oriented the leader is, and on the extent to which the leader controls the group and exercises his influence over it. Fiedler's assumption is that leaders can be divided into two broad types. The first is task-oriented and the second is relationship-oriented. A task-oriented leader is more concerned about getting the job done right. He or she is not interested in the relationships and feelings of employees. Potential advantages of this style are speed of decision making, subordinate to a common goal and strict control over subordinates. A relationship-oriented leader is primarily concerned with how employees feel and relate to one another. He or she seeks to improve work performance by improving human relations: encouraging mutual support, allowing subordinates to participate in making important decisions, considering employees' moods and needs, and so on. It was later found that the style of some managers could be both work-oriented and people-oriented at the same time.

Fiedler argued that neither of these two types of leader is more effective than the other. It all depends on the circumstances and on the nature of the situation, namely how much control the leader has and how much

influence he or she has among the group members. This is the cornerstone of his situational theory. In a 'high control' situation, the leader has excellent interpersonal relations with his subordinates, his position in the group is implicitly recognised as influential and dominant, and the work the group does is well structured and well defined. In a 'low control' situation, the opposite is true - the leader has a poor relationship with his subordinates, and the work to be done by the group is not clearly defined.

Task-oriented leaders are most effective in situations with either very high or very low control. In the case of very high control, people are happy and content, everything runs smoothly, and there is no need to worry about subordinates' feelings or their relationships. This is the case of 'the leader has a big cudgel in his hand, but everybody loves it'. Here, a leader who concentrates only on the task at hand achieves the best results. When control of the situation is very low, the task-oriented leader is better able to organise the situation. Using his authority, he is able to bring at least some order to a confused and uncertain work environment through orders and disciplinary action. This is a case of direct coercion: "No one likes a big stick in the hands of the manager, but everyone obeys it". However, it must be kept in mind that task orientation and dictatorship (or insulting subordinates) are not the same thing [7].

In medium control situations, relationship-oriented leaders are the most effective. In this case, all the gears of the working mechanism run fairly smoothly, but some attention still needs to be paid to the 'rough edges' arising from bad relationships and hurt feelings. A leader who is able to smooth over these rough edges acts most successfully in such a situation. Situation theory has been tested on numerous groups of leaders, from the presidents of multinational corporations to army commanders. The results of all these studies tend to be consistent with Fiedler's assumptions.

When we discussed the characteristics of task-oriented and relationship-oriented leaders, did that remind you of anything? Be honest: did it seem to you that male leaders are more task-oriented and female leaders more relationship-oriented? If so, you are not alone: gender (i.e. gender-role) stereotypes about male and female leadership styles are widespread. Women are thought to think more about the feelings of their employees, have better communication skills and are therefore more relationship-oriented. Men are often seen as rigid, authoritarian, Machiavellian leaders who do not pay much attention to the feelings of their subordinates and are much less concerned about their relationships.

Psychologists have studied hundreds of scientific studies in search of an answer to the question of how women's leadership style differs from that of men. They have found that, indeed, as is commonly believed, women tend to practice a more democratic leadership style than men. This may be because women have better communication skills. This allows them to use the abilities of group members when making decisions and, if necessary, politely reject their advice [4].

Does this mean that women are better leaders than men? As we can surmise from the situational theory of leadership, it depends on the nature of the situation. Women tend to be better leaders (both in objective measures of their performance and in peer evaluations) in areas where communication skills are particularly important, such as education. Men tend to be more successful leaders where the ability to decisively give orders and exercise control is required, such as in the military.

Before drawing far-reaching conclusions from these data, we must consider some additional factors. First, the differences found are not that great. There are many women quite capable of adopting a 'masculine' (male) leadership style, especially if the nature of the work requires it. And there are many men who have just as much social skills as women. Moreover, in any study of leadership effectiveness, the following problem

arises: do the data collected really reflect differences or only common stereotypes about leadership? If, for example, a woman is described as a less effective leader than a man, is this because she is actually the worst leader or because her co-workers use a different scale to assess her performance?

Old wisdom says that because of gender discrimination, a woman has to be "twice as good as a man" in order to succeed. Unfortunately, differences in the assessment of male and female leaders do in fact exist. If a woman practices a stereotypically "masculine" leadership style, if she is a typical "boss" and task-oriented, she is evaluated more negatively than a male leader with the same style. This is especially evident in cases where assessments are made by men. The psychologists Dore Butler and Florence Geis asked their female and male assistants to take a leadership role in a group of students discussing a business problem[4]. The leaders, both male and female, were assertive but friendly, and took the discussion firmly into their own hands. How did the rest of the group respond to such a leader? The results were disappointing for the women. When a man asserted himself as the leader of the group and acted assertively, the other group members reacted favourably. When a woman acted in this way, group members, especially men, reacted much more negatively. It turns out that men feel very uncomfortable if a woman uses the same leadership style that men usually allow themselves.

The terms 'leader' and 'manager' are similar in meaning, so they are often used synonymously. But they are not identical. Leadership is a psychological phenomenon, whereas leadership is purely managerial. A leader spontaneously dominates a group with the explicit or implicit consent of the majority of its members. His influence and authority are mostly informal [3]. A leader is a formal superior occupying a formal position. Therefore, the actual leader of a group is not always its formal leader and vice versa.

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